

Mike and El: A Week by Rosy_el

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Summary:

(Eventually) All of the Mileven Week 2016 prompts.

1. It's Good to be Home

Notes for the Chapter:

Mileven Day 2 prompt: Favorite quote

November, 1983

“Dustin, you wait out here while I help El get cleaned up,” Mike ushered a dirt-covered Eleven into the bathroom—the same bathroom she’d first ever been given “privacy.” Mike didn’t seem to want to grant her any now.

He let the door fall shut and pulled a clean, white rag from the mirror cupboard. Eleven watched in silence as Mike yanked on the faucet handle and let the water run over his knuckles until it felt adequately warm. He stuck the rag under the flow of water and soaked it lightly.

“Come here,” he murmured, the same voice he’d used when he’d brushed her cheeks with that strange pink powder in the pretty sister’s bedroom. Eleven complied, allowing the boy to raise the worn rag to her forehead, and then her cheeks, and then her nose, and then her chin.

He finished and took her in. “That’s better,” Mike breathed, nodding subtly at the now-satisfactory cleanliness of El’s face. Her brown eyes, deep and serious, studied Mike’s own face before she turned and caught her reflection in the mirror.

A disappointment fogged up in her chest at the portrait staring back at her. Wet eyes and a sullen face lit the dim glass. Her wig: gone. Dirty and no longer blonde, forgotten in the woods next to a pile of abandoned Eggo boxes. The only thing that had ever connected her to normalcy: that stupid costume wig crammed at the bottom of cold storage boxes. El rubbed her head, her palm against the fuzzy buzz-cut that labeled her a freak, a weirdo, hardly human.

“You don’t need it.”

Mike’s voice stirred El. She blinked and dropped her hand away from

her scalp. She spoke quietly, unsure. “Still pretty?” Her eyes fell from the mirror and she turned to look at him.

It came with no hesitation: “Yeah!” He assured her, without a second thought. El’s eyes were dark and her nose pink from the crisp air they had only minutes before taken shelter from. “Pretty. Really pretty.”

Eleven waited for him to add “good,” but the word didn’t come. She felt the cloud sitting in ribs disappear, replaced by a sphere of hot sunshine. She looked back at the mirror. A content breath left her lips.

Mike stared at her and then scrunched his face, his eyes sliding between her and the floor and back up. He didn’t know what he was doing but his mouth was moving anyway.

“El?”

The girl pulled her gaze from the glass and let it flicker to Mike. Her voice was soft, kind. “Yes?”

Mike felt his mouth going dry. This girl, a stranger to him merely days before—no, a *science experiment* held hostage in some hidden lab—suddenly made his heart hammer in his ears. She looked at him expectantly and he was trying to remember how to breathe manually. “Uh, uhm, I’m happy you’re home.” His eyes didn’t leave hers.

“Me too,” came El’s reply. Funny how this house had gone from totally foreign to *home* in a matter of days. But Eleven didn’t question it. She offered Mike a small smile.

His eyes slipped from hers and he stumbled over his thoughts. When they found El’s eyes again, a heaviness coated the tiny bathroom all at once, pushing the walls in from all sides and forcing the pair closer. Mike felt his head pulling closer to El’s as she felt her feet stepping forward. She’d never been so close to another person’s face before, didn’t know why anyone would put their face so close to another’s—nearly nose to nose now. Her brain was white and full of static but her body seemed to know exactly what it was doing and exactly what it wanted. Mike’s feet stayed rooted in place but his eyes looked curious and encouraging and so still, her feet moved

forward. She could see every freckle that dappled Mike's cheeks, could count them if she wanted to. His eyes looked black in the shadow of the low-lit bathroom, El couldn't even find his pupils—

“Guys!” The door shot open and smacked the adjacent wall. Mike and El flew apart, heads swerving to look at Dustin. “It's Lucas. I think he's in trouble.”

2. Superpowers Not Required

Summary for the Chapter:

Mileven Day Three: Eleven Protecting Mike

September, 1986

El had been finding the notes for about a month now, roughly since her sophomore year had begun; crammed in her locker, sticking out between pages of her Earth Systems textbook, shoved into the pocket of her jeans when she pulled them out after gym class.

Should've guessed Frog Face Wheeler would be the only one to try dating you.

Of course Mike Wheeler would like you. You look like a boy and he's a queer.

Your boyfriend is a fag, Hopper.

This one was in her regular locker, almost hidden by her stacks of books. She willed herself not to read the scribbled notes but found her fingers peeling the lined paper open anyway, eyes tripping over the loopy purple-inked handwriting. The words inside made her stomach crawl into her throat.

Does Mike moan math equations when you two are making out? Or just the names of boys?

The slip of paper was reduced to shreds within moments, the remnants of the purple letters floating to the bottom of the nearest trashcan. Eleven blinked back hot tears and swallowed, straightening her jacket in determination. She'd been warned about mean kids at school, had seen the way bullies tormented Mike, Lucas, Dustin, and Will relentlessly. She'd broken an arm and even a few fingers but the boys told her, some with begrudging reluctance, that she had to stop. The last thing Eleven needed was another crazed police report with her name on it. Even if Hopper would throw it out, they couldn't manage the risk of any extra attention on the mysterious girl with

questionable legal documentations fabricating her birthday and even her given name.

“Hiya, El!” It was Dustin’s voice. Eleven turned and was met with her best friends bounding down the hallway toward her. She forgot about the sparkly purple ink for a second before her brown eyes fell on Mike, his eager smile making her chest feel prickly and hot.

“Hi,” he said warmly, his fingers brushing her wrist before he blushed and shoved his hands deep into his jean pockets. Eleven threw a look at the trashcan where the note lay in its grave. Mike smiled naively at her and guilt blackened the girl’s veins.

“Friends tell each other everything,” Will had told her once. The notion had filled her with glittery joy. She didn’t talk much still, but not much happened to her either, so there wasn’t a whole lot to tell her friends. And she loved that—the normalcy that now filled up most of her normal, fifteen-year-old life.

“You know you can tell me anything, right?” That was Mike. His words had made her heartbeat flutter in her ears and her kiss float to the boy’s freckled cheek, right under his eye. But now the same memory filled her with slimy dread. Why did she feel such intense guilt about hiding the notes from Mike? She was protecting him, El reminded herself over and over.

She slipped a smile onto her lips, praying the expression was convincing enough to go without question. Taking Mike’s excited chatter about a new campaign that he was nearly finished with as a sign that her acting was adequate, El fell into the group’s quick rhythm, offering a comment every now and then. But it never took long before the goopy purple ink came back to the front of her mind.

They were coming up on El’s house when Mike murmured it to her: “Is everything okay, El?”

Her eyes flickered to his and she offered a short nod. A smile pushed her lips upward and she nodded again, more confidently. “Everything’s great! I’ll see you guys tomorrow!”

Mike watched her carefully before grinning again, stepping backward

off the curb in front of the Hopper house. "I'll call you after dinner, okay?"

Eleven chewed the inside of her lip and nodded a third time. "Okay."

The telephone rang at 7:04. El let it ring. Then she let it ring again. After a third time, the calls stopped.

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"Why didn't you pick up the phone last night?" Mike asked shyly as the boys broke off to head to class and he fumbled with the lock on his metal locker. "I called, like, twice."

"My dad wouldn't let me talk—homework wasn't finished," she lied coolly. Eleven smirked to herself, kicking at the school tile as Mike fished out his textbooks. "And you called three times, actually."

Mike rolled his eyes at the blood he knew must have rushed to his ears and smiled at Eleven gently. His eyes flicked from hers and landed on something behind her. Eyebrow perked up, El turned to look at what he was staring at. "Lorelei Clark just put something in your locker, I think." Eleven gulped and found the girl in her gaze, hot rage boiling in her stomach and toes. "Are you going to see what it is?" Mike asked innocently.

Eleven shook her head urgently, pulling on his elbow, trying to coax him away and off to first period. But Mike stood solid and started walking instead to El's locker. "Let's see what it is, El." Eleven pulled harder on his elbow and he looked at her, confused and worried all at once. "What is it? Why won't you see what she put in your locker?"

"We're going to be late to class, Mike!" Eleven lied again sharply, willing her voice to stay even and light.

He was unconvinced and reached for the lock fastened to her locker, spinning in the code with ease. Mike knew her combination better than his own; he'd leave full-size skittle packages in there and sometimes even new gel pens. "Mike, don't," El cried, ripping the folded note he picked up from his fingers.

"El?" He looked down at her, pleading in his deep brown-black eyes.

She choked on a reply as he took the paper back calmly and opened it up.

El wouldn't watch him read whatever purple-inked horrible things were undoubtedly scrawled on the slip of ripped notebook paper. She couldn't. Eleven flipped around and found the back of Lorelei Clark's head instead, a light blonde ponytail bobbing up and down.

"Hey!" Eleven wasn't even processing the words spilling from her hateful mouth. "Lorelei!"

Lorelei paused and turned around, her flank of friends turning with her. Their snickering smiles stilled, looks of shock muting their laughter. They had never been caught.

"You've been writing the notes?" Eleven surprised herself with the confidence her voice suddenly adopted, her body rooted in place and her fists clenched at her sides.

Lorelei frowned and glanced at her miniature army of friends. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"That's bullshit." Lorelei's friends and the other now-silent high school students in the hallway gasped and muttered to one another. El inwardly grimaced at the sharp language that had just rolled off her tongue, courtesy of Dustin and Lucas' example (and even her father's occasional slip-up), but then remembered Mike, who stood somewhere behind her and had just read the new note. She concluded that the cuss word could be permitted for her current circumstances. She rolled her shoulders back and let her eyes fall into a purely seething glare. Lorelei Clark felt the hairs on her arms raise up. "I'm sure if we opened your backpack right now, I'd find a purple pen in there, right?" El asked.

Eleven walked toward the girl until there was only twelve inches separating them. Lorelei Clark was tall but El didn't mind looking up a little. "Mean girls only bully people because they're insecure."

"Shut up, you little freak," Lorelei spat, suddenly red in the face. The girls surrounding her gave each other knowing looks, eyebrows raised and eyes widened and whispers about Lorelei lacing the air.

Lorelei looked at the them and stamped her foot, humiliation burning at her skin. "It's not my fault your boyfriend Wheeler likes *boys*," she hissed, looking El up and down before snickering and shoving the girl into another teenage bystander to the side. "And it isn't my fault you fit his little gay fantasies *almost* perfectly," Lorelei added, shoving El hard again, this time sending her nose straight into a boy's shoulder. El winced and lifted a finger to her nose. It came away with blood.

"El!" She felt tears spring to her eyes at the sound of Mike's voice. He pushed people out of the way and came to her, lifting her jaw with his fingertips and inspecting her nose gently, concern flooding his eyes.

"Oh, stay out of it, you pathetic little queer—"

They told her she couldn't use her powers, but regular kids punched each other all the time. El whirled around and swung her fist at Lorelei's glossy face.

El and Lorelei were both sent home from school that day for fighting, El with aching knuckles and Lorelei with an ugly blackening bruise blossoming along her jaw. Mike skipped class even though he knew he'd have a lot of explaining to do to Karen Wheeler. He sat against the wall outside with El, waiting for Hop to pull up in his squad car to escort Eleven home.

"Why didn't you tell me?"

Eleven stared at the pavement and touched her swollen fingers timidly. "I was trying to protect you."

Mike's eyes lingered on her hands as she examined her bones curiously. He smiled disjointedly and shook out his hair in frustration. "I've been called names since grade school, El. It's nothing new. You didn't have to keep it all a secret," he hesitated, "for me."

El forced her eyes up, but only to Mike's nose. That seemed to be her current limit. "Yes I did. One secret to stop you from getting one more bad memory. That's worth it."

Eleven felt Mike's lips on her own before she saw the flash of his pale skin or dark hair. His kiss was hard and then he pulled away, face hot and blood-colored. El was suddenly okay with seeing that color again.

A honk broke up her thoughts. Her eyes shot up, where she found a fuming Hopper behind the front wheel on his police car.

"You can tell me anything, El. Just because you're a superhero doesn't mean you have to hide things from me, okay?"

She glanced backward and offered the boy who was still sitting up against the wall of the high school the prettiest smile she'd ever given anyone. "Okay, Mike." It utterly blew Mike's mind that Lorelei could ever say El looked remotely anything like a boy. Sure, Eleven skipped makeup and left her wavy, short hair blunt and natural but Mike was sure she was the most *girl* thing he'd ever laid eyes on.

"I'll call you after dinner!"

"I'll pick up!"

She could hear Mike's low laughter when she pulled on the passenger-side door. It was locked. Jim rolled the window down. "Starting fights now?" He stared at her from behind his sunglasses, nodding his head to the backseat where they detained the people they arrested and convicts going to court. "You gonna pull a stunt like that," he lowered his sunglasses menacingly at the girl.

"You can sit in the back."

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El answered the phone on the first ring at 7:02 so Hop wouldn't be quick enough to catch it.

By 7:56, El knew her dad would be calling her into the living room for ice cream and Magnum, P.I. any second. (It was a weekly ritual of theirs that Jim had threatened to revoke that night for her fighting antics. He'd forgiven the girl quite quickly, however, so their Mint-Chocolate-Chip-Magnum night would still be in full-swing.)

"Hey, wait, before you go," Mike's trailing voice kept El's ear on the phone. "Promise me you'll tell me if you find any more notes, okay? Or if anyone else is mean to you."

El snorted into the receiver, a light embarrassed pink tinting her neck at Mike's adamant protectiveness. Even if she really liked it.

"Promise?" He repeated.

She sighed softly, a genuine smile lighting her face. "Promise."

Notes for the Chapter:

What did you think?? :)